THE STORY OF A CAT

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

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THE STORY OF A CAT

THE STORY OF A CAT

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
EMILE DE LA BÉDOLLIÈRE

BY
THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

WITH SILHOUETTES BY L. HOPKINS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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PREFACE.

M. Bédollière's charming story of Mother Michel and her cat was turned into English for the entertainment of two small readers at the writer's fireside. Subsequently the translation was fortunate enough to find a larger audience in the pages of a popular juvenile magazine. The ingenious and spirited series of silhouettes with which Mr. Hopkins has enriched the text is the translator's only plea for presenting in book form so slight a performance as his own part of the work.

THE STORY OF A CAT.

CHAPTER I.

HOW MOTHER MICHEL MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF HER CAT.

HERE lived in Paris, under the reign of King Louis XV., a very rich old countess named Yolande de la Grenouillère. She was a worthy and charitable lady, who distributed alms not only to the poor of her own parish, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, but to the unfortunate of other quarters. Her husband, Roch-Eustache-Jérémie, Count of Grenouillère, had fallen gloriously at the battle of Fontenoy, on the 11th of May, 1745. The noble widow had long mourned for him, and even now at times wept over his death. Left without children, and almost entirely alone in the world, she gave herself up to a strange fancy, — a fancy, it is true, which in no

manner detracted from her real virtues and admirable qualities: she had a passion for animals. And an unhappy passion it was, since all those she had possessed had died in her arms.

The first, in date, in her affections had been a green parrot, which, having been so imprudent as to

The Countess distributes Alms.

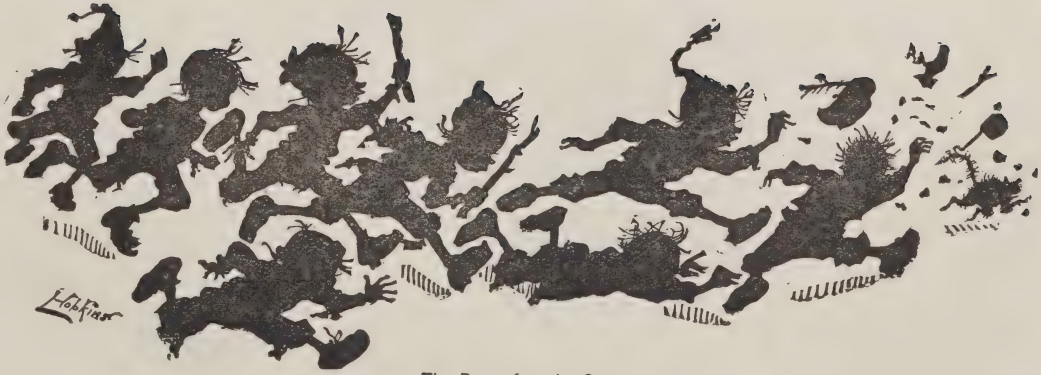
eat some parsley, fell a victim to frightful colics. An indigestion, caused by sweet biscuits, had taken from Madame de la Grenouillère a pug-dog of the most brilliant promise. A third favorite, an ape of a very interesting species, having broken his chain one night, went clambering over the trees in the garden, where, during a shower, he caught a cold in the head, which conducted him to the tomb.

Following these, the Countess had birds of divers kinds; but some of them had flown away, and the others had died of the pip. Cast down by such continuous disasters, Madame de la Grenouillère shed many tears. Seeing her inconsolable, the friends of the Countess proposed successively squirrels, learned canaries, white mice, cockatoos; but she would not listen to them; she even refused a superb spaniel who played dominoes, danced to music, ate salad, and translated Greek.

The Ape fatally exposes himself.

Her Friends propose Squirrels, Canaries, Mice, etc.

"No, no," she said, "I do not want any more animals; the air of my house is death to them."



The Boys after the Cat.

She had ended by believing in fatality.

One day, as the Countess was leaving the church, she saw a crowd of boys hustling and elbowing each other, and giving vent to peals of joyous laughter. When, seated in her carriage, she was able to overlook the throng, she discovered that the cause of this tumult was a poor cat to whose tail the little wretches had tied a tin saucepan.

The unfortunate cat had evidently been running a long time, for he seemed overcome with fatigue. Seeing that he slackened his speed, his tormentors formed a circle around him, and began pelting him with stones. The luckless creature bowed his head, and, recognizing that he was surrounded by none but enemies, resigned himself to his hard fate with the heroism of a Roman senator. Several stones had already reached him, when Madame de la Grenouillère, seized with deep compassion, descended from her carriage, and, pushing the crowd aside, exclaimed: "I will give a louis to whoever will save that animal!"

These words produced a magical effect; they transformed the persecutors into liberators; the poor cat came near being suffocated by those who now disputed the honor of rescuing him safe and sound. Finally, a sort of young Hercules overthrew his rivals, brought off the cat, and presented it half dead to the Countess.

"Very well," she said; "here, my brave little man, is the reward I promised." She gave him a

The Luckless Creature bowed his Head.

bright golden louis just out of the mint, and then added, "Relieve this poor animal of his inconvenient burden."

While the young Hercules obeyed, Madame de la Grenouillère regarded the creature she had rescued. It was a true type of the street-cat. His natural hideousness was increased by the accidents of a long

"Dear me, how homely he is!"

and irregular career; his short hair was soiled with mud; one could scarcely distinguish beneath the various splashes his gray fur robe striped with black. He was so thin as to be nearly transparent, so shrunken that one could count his ribs, and so dispirited that a mouse might have beaten him. There was only one thing in his favor, and that was his physiognomy.

The Cat is presented, half dead, to the Countess.

"Dear me, how homely he is!" said Madame de la Grenouillère, after finishing her examination.

At the moment she stepped into the carriage, the cat fixed his great sea-green eyes upon her and gave her a look, strange, indefinable, full at the same time of gratitude and reproach, and so expressive that the good lady was instantly fascinated. She read in this glance a discourse of great eloquence. The look seemed to wish to say,—

"You have obeyed a generous impulse; you saw me feeble, suffering, oppressed, and you took pity on me. Now that your benevolence is satisfied, my deformity inspires you with contempt. I thought you were good, but you are not good; you have the instinct of kindness, but you are not kind. If you were really charitable you would continue to interest yourself in me for the very reason that I am homely; you would reflect that my misfortunes are owing to my ugly appearance, and that the same cause,— should you leave me there in the street, at the mercy of the wicked boys,— the same cause, I say, would produce the same effects. Go! you need n't pride yourself on your half-way benevolence!— you have not done me a service; you have only prolonged my agony. I am an outcast, the whole world is against me, I am condemned to die; let my destiny be accomplished!"

Madame de la Grenouillère was moved to tears. The cat seemed to her superhuman — no, it was a

cat; it seemed to her superanimal! She thought of the mysteries of transformation, and imagined that the cat, before assuming his present form, had been a great orator and a person of standing. She said to her maid, Mother Michel, who was in the carriage, —

"Take the cat and carry him."

"What, you will bring him with you, madame?" cried Mother Michel.

"Certainly. As long as I live that animal shall have a place at my fireside and at my table. If you wish to please me, you will treat him with the same zeal and affection you show to myself."

"Madame shall be obeyed."

"That is well, — and now for home!"

Mother Michel is told to take the Cat.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE CAT WAS INSTALLED WITH MADAME DE LA GRENOUILLÈRE, AND CONFIDED TO THE CARE OF MOTHER MICHEL.

Madame de la Grenouillère inhabited a magnificent mansion situated on the corner of the streets Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre and Orties-Saint-Louis; there she led a very retired life, on almost intimate terms with her two principal domestics, — Madame Michel, her maid and companion, and M. Lustucru, the steward. These servants being elderly persons, the Countess, who was possessed of a pleasant humor, had christened them Mother Michel and Father Lustucru.

Mother Michel.

The features of Mother Michel bore the imprint of her amiable disposition; she was as open and candid as Father Lustucru was sly and dissimulating. The plausible air of the steward might deceive persons without much experience; but close observers could easily discover the most perverse in-

clinations under his false mask of good nature. There was duplicity in his great blue eyes, anger concentrated in his nostrils, something wily in the end of his tapering nose, and malice in the shape of his lips.

However, this man had never, in appearance, at least, done anything to forfeit his honor; he had been able to guard an outside air of honesty, hiding very carefully the blackness of his nature. His wickedness was like a mine to which one has not yet applied the match, — it waited only for an occasion to flash out.

Father Lustucru.

Lustucru detested animals, but, in order to flatter the taste of his mistress, he pretended to idolize them. On seeing Mother Michel bearing in her arms the rescued cat, he said to himself:

"What, another beast! As if there were not enough of us in the house!"

He could not help throwing a glance of antipathy at the new-comer; then, curbing himself quickly, he cried, with an affected admiration, —

"Oh, the beautiful cat! the pretty cat! that cat has n't his equal!" — and he caressed it in the most perfidious fashion.

"Truly?" said Madame de la Grenouillère; "you do not find him too homely?"

"Oh, the Beautiful Cat!"

"Too homely! But, then, he has charming eyes. But, if he was frightful, your interesting yourself in him would change him."

"He displeased me at first."

"The beings who displease at first are those one loves the most after awhile," replied Father Lustucru, sententiously.

They proceeded at once to make the toilet of the cat, who, in spite of his instinctive horror of water, submitted with touching resignation to being washed; he seemed to understand that it improved his personal appearance. After giving him a dish of broken meat, which he ate with great relish, they arranged the hours for his meals, the employment of his days, and the place where he was to sleep.

The Cat is washed.

They thought also to give him a name. Mother Michel and Father Lustucru proposed several that were quite happy, such as Mistigris, Tristepatte, etc.; but the Countess rejected them all successively. She desired a name that would recall the circumstances in which the cat was found. An old scholar, whom she consulted the next day, suggested that of Moumouth, composed of two Hebrew words which signify *saved from saucepans.*

At the end of a few days, Moumouth was unrecognizable. His fur was polished with care; nourishing food had filled out his form; his mustaches stood up like those of a swordsman of the seventeenth century; his eyes shone as emeralds. He was a living proof of the influence of good fare upon the race. He owed his excellent condition chiefly to Mother Michel, whom he held in affectionate consideration; he showed, on the other hand, for Father Lustucru a very marked dislike. As if he had divined that here

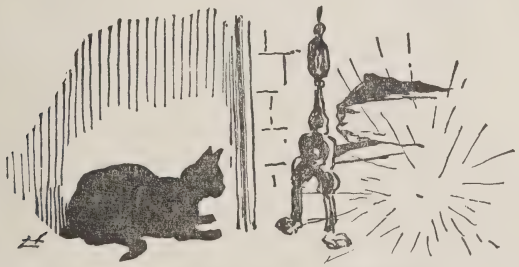
The Old Scholar looks for a Name.

The Cat grows Fat.

He will take Nothing from the Steward.

he had to do with an enemy, he refused to accept anything presented by the steward. However, they

saw but little of each other. The days passed very happily with Moumouth, and everything promised a smiling future for him; but, like the sword of Damocles, troubles are ever suspended above the heads of men and of cats. On the 24th of January, 1753, an unusual sadness was observed in Moumouth; he scarcely responded to the caresses which Madame de la Grenouillère lavished upon him; he ate nothing, and spent the day crouched on a corner of the hearth, gazing mournfully into the fire. He had a



He crouches in a Corner of the Hearth.

presentiment of some misfortune, and the misfortune came.

That night a messenger, sent from the Château de la Gingeole in Normandy, brought a letter to the Countess from her younger sister, who, having broken a leg in getting out of her carriage, begged the Countess, her only relative, to come to her at once. Madame de la Grenouillère was too sympathetic and kind-hearted to hesitate an instant.

"I depart to-morrow," said she.

At these words, Moumouth, who followed his benefactress with his eyes, gave a melancholy *miau*.

"I depart To-morrow!"

"In her Youth she caressed a Kitten."

"Poor cat!" resumed the lady, with emotion, "it is necessary that we should be separated! I cannot bring you with me, for my sister has the weakness to hate animals of your species; she pretends they are treacherous. What slander! In her youth she caressed a kitten, who, too much excited by marks of affection, scratched her involuntarily. Was it from wickedness? No, it was from sensibility. However, since that day my sister has sworn an eternal hatred for cats."

Moumouth regarded his mistress with an air which seemed to say, —

"But you, at least, you do us justice, truly superior woman!"

After a moment of silence and meditation, the Countess added, —

"Mother Michel, I confide my cat to you."

"We will take good care of him, madame," said Father Lustucru.

"Don't you trouble yourself about him, I pray you," interrupted the Countess. "You know that

he has taken a dislike to you; your presence merely is sufficient to irritate him. Why, I don't know; but you are insupportable to him."

"That is true," said Father Lustucru, with contrition; "but the cat is unjust, for I love him and he does n't love me."

"Mother Michel, I confide my Cat to you."

"My sister is also unjust. Cats, perhaps, love her, and she does not love them. I respect her opinion. Respect that of Moumouth." Having pronounced these words in a firm tone, Madame de la Grenouillère addressed herself to Mother Michel.

"It is to you, Mother Michel, and to you alone, that I confide him. Return him to me safe and sound, and I will cover you with benefits. I am sixty-five years of age, you are ten years younger; it is probable that you will live to close my eyes" —

"Ah, madame! why such sorrowful ideas?"

"Let me finish. To guard against mischance, I have already thought to provide for you comfortably; but, if you keep Moumouth for me, I will give you a pension of fifteen hundred livres."

"Ah, madame!" said Mother Michel, in an impressive tone, "it is not necessary to hire my services; I love the cat with all my heart, and I will always be devoted to him."

"I am sure of it, and I shall also know how to reward your zeal." During this conversation, Father Lustucru employed all his forces to conceal the expression of his jealousy.

"Everything for her, and nothing for me!" he said to himself. "Fifteen hundred livres a year! It is a fortune, and she will have it! Oh, no! she shall not have it."

The next morning, at half-past seven, four lively

The Post-chaise is ready.

horses were harnessed to the post-chaise which was to convey the excellent old lady to Normandy. She said a last adieu to her favorite, pressed him to her heart, and stepped into the carriage.

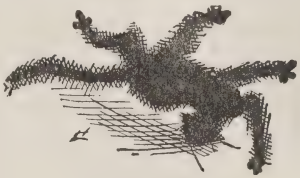
Until then, Moumouth had felt only a vague uneasiness; but at this moment he understood it all! He saw his benefactress ready to depart; and, trembling at the thought of losing her, he made one bound to her side.

"It is necessary for you to stay here," said Madame de la Grenouillère, making an effort to restrain her tears.

Will it be believed? — the cat also wept!

To put an end to this painful scene, Mother Michel seized the cat by the shoulders and detached him from the carriage-cushion, to which he clung; the door closed, the horses gave a vigorous pull, and started off at a speed of not less than three leagues an hour. Moumouth rolled in a convulsion, and then fainted.

The Cat wishes to go with the Carriage.



Moumouth faints.

Madame de la Grenouillère, her head stretched out of the post-chaise, waved her handkerchief, crying: —

"He shall die!"

"Mother Michel, I commend my cat to you!"

"Be tranquil, madame; I swear you shall find him large and plump when you return."

"And I," muttered Father Lustucru, in a deep voice, "I swear he shall die!"

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH ARE SHOWN THE GOODNESS OF MOTHER MICHEL AND THE WICKEDNESS OF FATHER LUSTUCRU.

OTHER MICHEL, worthy of the confidence which had been reposed in her, displayed for Moumouth a truly maternal tenderness; she tended him, coddled him, took such pains with him, in short, that he became one of the most beautiful cats in that quarter of the town where the cats are magnificent. She watched over him constantly, gave him the choicest bits to eat, and put him to bed at night on the softest of eider-down quilts.

Fearing that he might fall ill some day, and wishing to inform herself concerning the maladies to which cats are liable, she procured various books on that important subject; she even went so far in her devotion as to read the "History of Cats," by François-Auguste Paradis de Moncrif, a member of the French Academy.

The conduct of Mother Michel had no low motive

of personal interest. She gave scarcely a thought to herself, the good old soul! Content with little, she would always have enough to live on; she required nothing but a small room, brown bread, a supply of wood in winter, and a spinning-wheel. But she had nephews and nieces, god-children, whom she hoped to be able to help; it was to them that she destined in advance the gifts of Madame de la Grenouillère.

The continually increasing prosperity of Moumouth exasperated Father Lustucru. He saw with a sort of dread the approach of the hour when the faithful guardian would be rewarded; he dreamt day and night of the means to prevent it, — to carry off her four-footed pupil, and bring down on her the wrath of their mistress. By dint of indulging his hatred and envy in solitary reflections, he ceased at last to draw back at the prospect of committing a crime.

"How," he said, "how rid the house of that miserable cat? What arms shall I use against him? Fire, poison, or water? I will try water!"

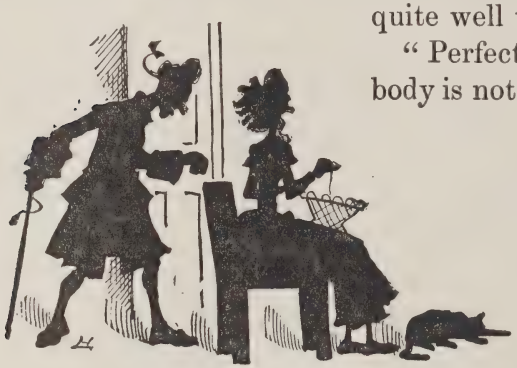
This resolution taken, he thought of nothing but to put it into execution. It was difficult to get possession of Moumouth, of whom Mother Michel rarely lost sight; and Moumouth, too, not having the slightest confidence in the steward, was always on the defensive. Lustucru watched during several days for a favorable occasion.

One night, after making an excellent supper, Mou-

mouth curled himself up near the fire in the parlor, at the feet of Mother Michel, and slept the sleep of the just with good digestion. In the midst of this, Father Lustucru came into the room.

"Good!" he thought. "The cat sleeps. Let us get the guardian out of the way."

"How amiable of you to come and keep me company!" said Mother Michel, politely. "You are quite well this evening?"



Father Lustucru's Stratagem.

"Perfectly; but everybody is not like me. Our porter, for example, is in a deplorable state; he is suffering excessively from his rheumatism, and would be very happy to see you a moment. You have gentle words to console the afflicted, and excellent receipts to cure them. Go, then, and pay a little visit to our friend Krautman; I am persuaded that your presence will help him."

The Porter.

Mother Michel got up at once and descended to the apartment of the porter, who was, indeed, suffering from a violent rheumatic pain.

"Now for us two!" cried Father Lustucru to himself.

He went stealthily into an adjoining room, walking upon the tips of his toes, and took a covered basket which he had hidden in the bottom of a closet. Then he returned to Moumouth, whom he seized roughly by the neck. The unfortunate animal awoke with a start, and found himself suspended in the air face to face with Father Lustucru, his enemy.

The Steward seizes Moumouth.

In that horrible situation he would have cried, and struggled, and called for assistance, but he had no time. The odious steward plunged the poor cat into the basket, quickly clapped down the solid cover, and ran rapidly to the staircase, his eyes haggard and his hair standing on end, like a man who commits a crime.

It was a beautiful night in February, with a clear sky and a dry, cold atmosphere. The moon shone

with all her brightness; but, at intervals, great clouds drifted over her face and rendered the obscurity complete. Father Lustucru was obliged to cross the garden, in order to pass out by a small door, of which he had taken the key. He glided from bush to bush, carefully avoiding the paths, except when the clouds veiled the moon. He had half-opened the door, when he heard a sound of footsteps and voices outside. He started back involuntarily, then stood still and listened.

The Cat is plunged into the Basket.

The Steward hurries away.

He dances with Delight.

"What foolishness!" he said, after a moment of silent observation. "I had forgotten that it was carnival-time; those are masqueraders passing."

It was, in effect, a band of masqueraders from the Palais Royal. Lustucru waited until they were gone; then he hurried out. When he reached the quay, in the joy of success, he

began to whistle a dancing-tune and cut capers; his transports resembled those of a cannibal who dances around his victim.

He went up the Seine as far as the bridge of Notre Dame, in the middle of which he halted, and holding the basket over the parapet, turned it suddenly upside down, and launched the luckless Moumouth into the icy waters of the river. The cat, in dropping through space, gave a cry that seemed to come from a human voice. The assassin shuddered, but his emotion did not last long. He thrust his hands into his pockets and said, in a tone of bitter mockery, —

"Pleasant voyage to you, dear Moumouth; endeavor to arrive all right! By the way," added he, "I think cats know how to swim; that brigand is capable of getting himself out of this business. Bah! it is a long distance from the bridge of Notre Dame to Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre!"

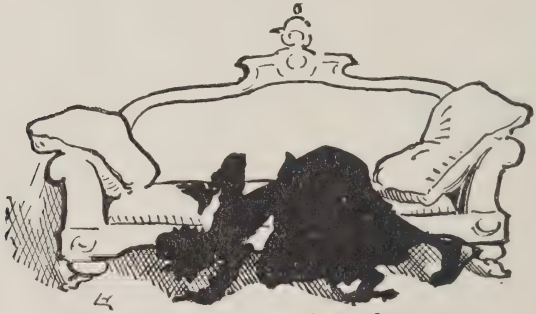
Reassured by this reflection, Lustucru continued on his way home, re-

The Cat is thrown into the River

entered by the door of the garden, climbed cautiously up to his room, and held himself in readiness to enjoy the lamentations of Mother Michel.

Mother Michel was detained some time by the porter; finally, she left him, to give her cat the cup of milk and sugar with which she regaled him every night.

She ascended to the parlor with measured steps, calmly, not anticipating any catastrophe. Failing to see Moumouth in the place he had occupied, she simply believed that he had smuggled himself behind the cushions of the sofa. She looked there, and beneath



Mother Michel looks for the Cat.

the sofa, and searched under the other pieces of furniture. Then, running to the staircase, she called: "Moumouth! Moumouth!"

"He does n't answer me," said she. "But when I went down-stairs, Lustucru was here; may be he can tell me what has become of the cat."

She knocked without delay at the door of the

steward, who pretended to rouse himself from a deep slumber, and, in a gruff voice, demanded what was wanted.

"Is n't Moumouth with you?"

"Does your cat ever come where I am? You know very well that he can't bear me."

"Alas! where is he? I left him in the parlor, near the fire, and I cannot find him."

She knocks at the Steward's Door.

"Can he be lost?" said Father Lustucru, feigning the most lively anxiety.

"Lost! Oh, no, it is impossible! He is somewhere in the house."

"He ought to be found," said the villain, gravely. "He ought to be searched for this very instant. Moumouth is a precious animal, whose merit makes it well worth while to wake up the servants."

All the inmates of the house were soon on foot, each armed with a candle. They ransacked the nooks and corners, from the cellar to the garret, from the court to the garden. Lustucru directed the operations with apparent zeal. After ineffectual searches, Mother Michel, exhausted by emotion and fatigue, threw herself helplessly into an arm-chair.

Every Nook and Corner is ransacked.

"Alas!" said she, "I left him only an instant, and it was to do a good action."

"I begin to believe that your cat is really lost," replied Lustucru, in a severe tone. "It is a great misfortune for you! What will Madame de la Grenouillère say when she comes back? She is capable of turning you out of doors!"

"Turn me out of doors!" cried Mother Michel, suddenly drawing herself up to her full height. Then she sunk down again, her face grew pallid, her eyes closed, and she fell back without consciousness.

The Shock is too much for Mother Michel.

Father Lustucru regarded her with a dry eye, and without feeling the slightest remorse. He laughed, the infamous man!

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE CAT DISPLAYS INTELLIGENCE BEYOND HIS STATION IN LIFE, AND BEHAVES HANDSOMELY IN ADVERSITY.

E lost sight of Moumouth at the moment when, precipitated from the parapet of the bridge of Notre Dame, he found himself struggling in the water.

Luckily for him, the piles of the principal arch had a wide ledge, to which he was able to attach himself. From this place he cast a glance around him. The Seine appeared to him a boundless ocean, which it was beyond his strength to cross; rather than attempt to reach the shores that seemed to recede before him, he prepared to stay where he was, at the risk of perishing with hunger or cold, or being swept away by a wave. He mewed at first in sign of distress, but very soon, believing himself hopelessly lost, he judged it useless to tire his lungs, and awaited the end with a resignation which formed the basis of his character.

Toward five o'clock in the morning, two gentlemen

from the island of Saint-Louis, — two very skillful amateur fishermen, — came to throw their lines from the top of the bridge of Notre Dame.

"You are early, neighbor Guignolet," said the person who arrived last; "it appears that we have both had the same idea."

"And we have done well, neighbor Groquemouche; there was a rise in the river last night, great numbers of fish have descended from the upper Seine, and one will have to be dreadfully awkward not to take them."

"Will you enter into an agreement, neighbor Guignolet? Let us fish in partnership, divide the catch, and dine together to-day."

"Agreed!" said M. Guignolet, and as each held his line in his right hand, they clasped their left hands together in token of the treaty.

"Agreed!" said M. Guignolet.

On seeing the two cords descend Moumouth conceived some hope. As soon as they were within his reach he grappled them, and the fishermen, feeling the unusual weight, cried out

The Fishermen pursue the Cat.

with one voice, "A bite! a bite!" and hastened to haul in their lines.

"I bet I have caught a wattle," said M. Guignolet, regretting that he could n't rub his hands together to testify his satisfaction.

"I must have an immense carp," replied M. Groquemouche. He had scarcely finished the sentence when Moumouth leaped over the parapet.

Moumouth grapples the Lines.

"Treason!" cried the two fishers, who started in pursuit of the quadruped that had come so miraculously out of the water; but Moumouth ran faster than they did and easily escaped them.

When he was alone, he took breath, examined the houses, and, not finding one that resembled his, naturally concluded that it was not there. It was necessary, however, to find shelter; shivering with cold and panting with his exertions, he could not remain a moment longer in the street without exposing himself to an inflammation of the chest. Guided by a light, he made his way into the basement of a baker's shop, and, hiding himself behind a pile of bread-baskets, went quietly to sleep.

He was awakened by hunger.

Moumouth was born of poor parents who had abandoned him in his earliest infancy; he had been brought up in the streets, obliged to procure his own living, and trained in the school of adversity. Thus he was very skillful in the art of catching rats and mice, — a useful art, too often neglected by cats belonging to the first families.

The Imprudent Mouse.

He placed himself on the watch, and surprised a mouse that had stolen out of its hole to eat some flour. He dropped upon the imprudent mouse, in describing what is called in geometry a parabola, and seized it by the nose, to prevent it from crying out. This feat, although performed with address and in silence, attracted the attention of the baker's boy. "Hi! a cat!" cried the apprentice, arming himself with a scoop.

"Don't hurt him!" said the Baker.

The master-baker turned his eyes towards Moumouth, saw him devouring the mouse, and said to the boy: —

"Don't hurt him; he is doing us a service."

"But where did he come from?"

"What does that matter, provided he is useful here?" answered the baker, who was a man of intelligence. "Eat, eat, my friend," he continued, stooping down to gently caress Moumouth; "eat as many mice as possible, there will always be enough left."

Our cat profited by the permission accorded to him, and, having satisfied his hunger, had a desire to set out in search of the mansion of Madame de la Grenouillère; but the baker barred the passage.

"Wait a minute!" he said. "I wanted a good cat; Heaven sent me one, and I shall not forgive myself if I let him escape. Hulloo! Jacques, shut up all the openings, and if this rogue makes a show of running off, give him three or four smart blows with the broom."

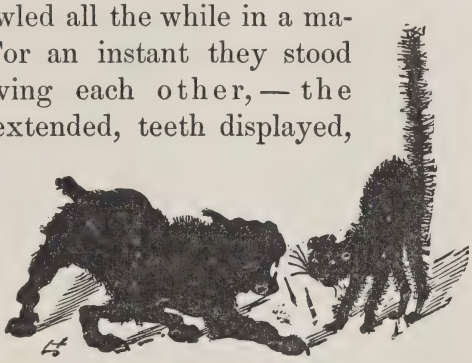
Thus the host of Moumouth became his tyrant; so true is it that personal interest depraves the best natures. Our cat, as if comprehending what was passing, leaped without hesitation upon the shoulders of the baker's boy, and thence into the street.

Moumouth jumps out of the Window

There a new danger awaited him. Surprised by this unexpected apparition, an enormous bull-dog planted himself directly in front of Moumouth. Moumouth had a lively de-

All the Street Dogs pursue Moumouth.

sire to avoid an unequal contest, but the dog kept an eye on him, and did not lose one of his movements, going to the right when Moumouth went to the left, and to the left when Moumouth moved to the right, and growled all the while in a malicious fashion. For an instant they stood motionless, observing each other, — the dog with paws extended, teeth displayed, and body drawn back, and the cat with open mouth, his back arched and his head thrust forward.



He meets a Bull-dog.

Neither seemed disposed to begin hostilities. Finally the dog rushed upon his adversary, who avoided him adroitly, passed underneath him, and fled in the direction of the quay, the bull-dog giving chase. Away they went, darting among the crowd of pedestrians and in and out between the carriages. In a natural spirit of imitation, the wandering dogs that encountered them running joined in the race, and at the end of a minute Moumouth had more than thirty-seven dogs in pursuit of him.

"I am lost," he says to himself, "but at least I shall sell my life dearly."

He backs against a wall, and braces himself haughtily on his feet; his teeth gnashing, his hair bristling,

he faces his numerous enemies with so terrible an eye that they recoil like a single man. Profiting by their hesitation, he turns suddenly and scrambles to the top of the wall. He is soon beyond the reach of the dogs, but he is not yet in safety; if he makes a false step, if his strength gives out, if the plaster crumbles under his claws, twenty yawning mouths, hungry for slaughter, are there to tear him to pieces!

He climbs a Wall.

In the meanwhile, Mother Michel had passed the night in lamentation. She could not control her grief for the loss of Moumouth; she called him continually in a plaintive voice, and — if we may credit the popular song — the neighbors heard her cry at the window: "Who will bring him back to me?"

Mother Michel laments.

The next morning, at the rising of the smiling sun,

the perfidious Lustucru presented himself before Mother Michel in order to say to her : —

" Well, my dear companion, have you found him ? "

" Alas, no ! " she murmured. " Have you any news of him ? "

" Nothing positive," replied the steward, who wished to torment the poor woman ; " but I dreamed of him all night long ; he appeared to me in a dream, with his face pale and an exhausted air, like a cat who did not feel very well."

Father Lustucru dreams.

" In what place was he ? "

" He seemed to be in a garden, at the foot of a lilac-bush."

Mother Michel instantly ran to the garden, where, as you may imagine, she did not find Moumouth.

During the whole day Lustucru amused himself by giving her false exultations, which were followed by increased despondency.

" Mother Michel," said he, " just now, in passing the store-room, I thought I heard a kind of meyowing."

Mother Michel hastened to visit the store-room.

Presently he came to her out of breath, and said : — " We have him at last ! I am nearly certain that he is rummaging in the cellar."

Mother Michel encounters nothing but Rats.

And Mother Michel ventured into the gloomy vaults of the cellar, where she encountered nothing but rats.

It was near the close of the day that Lustucru pronounced these words, which a popular song has happily preserved for us : —

" Oh, Mother Michel,
Your cat is not lost ;
He is up in the garret
A-hunting the rats,
With his little straw gun
And his sabre of wood ! "

The words were full of a bitter raillery, which Father Lustucru was unable to disguise. To pretend that Moumouth was hunting rats with his little straw gun and his wooden sword was to suppose something quite unlikely, for nobody ever saw a cat make use of such arms. But the agonies of Mother Michel had so confused her mind, that she noticed only what could give her a gleam of hope.

" He is in the garret ! " she cried, without paying attention to the rest of the verse. " Let us hasten there, my dear sir ; let us search for him. Give me your arm, for I am so nervous, so troubled, so har-

assed by fatigue, that I have not the strength to get up alone."

The two mounted to the garret, and Mother Michel, lantern in hand, searched in the attic and under the roof. Silence and solitude reigned everywhere.

She searches the Attic.

"You are again mistaken," murmured Mother Michel.

"No, no," replied the malicious man; "let us continue to hunt, we shall finish by finding. We have n't looked there — behind those fagots."

The credulous Mother Michel advanced in the direction indicated, and — to the great stupefaction of Lustucru — the cat, which he believed drowned, appeared in full health and strength, and fixed its gaze upon him indignantly.

"It is he! It is he!" cried Mother Michel.

"It is he! it is he!" cried Mother Michel, seizing Moumouth in her arms. "Ah, my dear Lustucru! my good and true friend, how I thank you for conducting me here!"

The steward had scarcely any taste for compliments which he so little merited. Pale-faced and cold, he hung his head before his victim, whose preservation he could not explain to himself. It was, however, a very simple thing: Moumouth, pursued by the dogs, succeeded in leaping from the wall, and, passing from gutter to gutter, from garden to garden, from roof to roof, had reached his domicil; but, dreading the resentment of his enemy, he had not dared to appear, and had hidden himself in the garret.

"Am I the dupe of a nightmare?" said Father Lustucru to himself. "Is it really that rascal of a Moumouth that I have there under my eyes, in flesh and bone? Is n't it his ghost that has come back to torment me? This cat, then, is the evil one in person!"

The cat was not the evil one — Providence had protected him.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE CAT CONTENDS SUCCESSFULLY AGAINST HIS ENEMY.

THE events we have recorded indicate very clearly the position of our personages. Fearing to lose both the well-beloved cat and the advantages she was ambitious to obtain, Mother Michel redoubled her vigilance and attention.

Moumouth, knowing henceforth with whom he had to deal, promised himself to avoid the steward, or to fight him, if need be, with tooth and nail.

As to Father Lustucru, it was enough that his projects had been defeated, in order that he should persist in them with desperation. He now wished the destruction of the poor and innocent cat, not only on account of his jealousy of Mother Michel, but because he hated the cat itself.

"Oh, what humiliation!" he said to himself, with bitterness. "I ought to hide myself, retire to a desert, and bury me in the bowels of the earth! What! I, Jérôme Lustucru, a grown man, a man of knowledge and experience, a man — I dare say it — charming in society, I am vanquished, scoffed at, taken for a dupe, by a cat of the gutter! . . . I leave him at the bottom of a river, and find him at the top of a house! I wish to separate him from his guardian, and I am the means of bringing them together! I lead Mother Michel to the garret to torture her, and there I witness her transports of joy! The cat I believed dead reappears to defy me! . . . . He shall not defy me long!"

Lustucru meditates.

And Father Lustucru remained absorbed in deep meditation.

Moumouth had not yet dined that day, and he made it plain by expressive miau-ing that he would very willingly place something under his teeth. Presently, Mother Michel said to him — for she spoke to him as if he were an intelligent being, —

"Have patience, sir; we are going to attend to you."

She descended to the parlor, which she habitually occupied since the departure of Madame de la Grenouillère, and the cat, who accompanied Mother Michel, was clearly displeased at seeing her take the

road to the chamber of Lustucru. Nevertheless, he went in with her, persuaded that in the presence of that faithful friend the steward would not dare to undertake anything against him.

At the moment she knocked at the door, Father Lustucru was taking from the shelf a green package which bore this label: *Death to Rats.*

"This is the thing," he said to himself, thrusting the paper into his vest. "*Death to Rats* should also be *Death to Cats.* Our dear Moumouth shall make the trial. . . . . What can one do to serve you, my good Mother Michel?"

The Green Package.

"It is five o'clock, M. Lustucru, and you forget my cat."

"*I* forget him!" cried the steward, clasping his hands as if very much hurt by the suspicion, "I was just thinking of him. . . . . I am going to prepare for him such a delicious hash that he will never want another!"

"Thanks, Monsieur Lustucru! I shall inform Madame, the Countess, of your care for her favorite. I have received a letter from her this very day; she sends me word that she shall return shortly; that she hopes to find Moumouth in good condition, and that she has in reserve for me a very handsome reward. You comprehend my joy, Monsieur Lustucru! My sister is left a widow with four children, to whom I hand over my little savings each year. Until now this assistance has not been much; but, thanks to the gifts of Madame, the Countess, the poor children will be able to go to school and learn a trade."

In pronouncing these words the eyes of Mother Michel were moist and bright with the most sweet joy, — that which one experiences in performing or meditating good actions. The steward, however, was not affected. He had so given himself up to his evil passions that they completely mastered him, and had by degrees stifled all generous sentiments in his soul, as the tares which one lets grow choke the good grain.

"Come, let us go!"

One would have said that Moumouth understood this man. The cat approached Mother Michel, who had seated herself to chat awhile, and looking at her with supplicating eyes, pulled at the skirt of her robe, as if to say to her: —

"Come, let us go!"

"Take care!" said the good creature, "you will tear my dress."

Moumouth began again.

"What is it? Do you want to get out of here?" asked Mother Michel.

Moumouth made several affirmative capers in the air.

"Decidedly," she added, "this cat is not contented anywhere but in the parlor."

She rose and withdrew, preceded by Moumouth, who bounded with joy.

A quarter of an hour afterward the steward had prepared a most appetizing hash composed of the breast of chicken, the best quality of bread, and other ingredients justly esteemed by dainty eaters. After adding a large dose of the "Death to Rats," he set the hash down in an adjoining room, and, opening the parlor door, cried:

"Monsieur is served!!"

Moumouth is pleased to see the Hash.

On beholding this delicate dish, Moumouth thrilled with pleasure, for, to tell the truth, he was rather greedy. He stretched his nose over the plate, and then suddenly retreated, arching his back. A sickening and infectious odor

had mounted to his nostrils. He made a tour round the plate, took another sniff, and again retreated. This animal, full of sagacity, had scented the poison.

He sniffs with Disgust.

"Well, that is very extraordinary," said Mother Michel; and, having vainly offered the food to her cat, she went to find Lustucru, to inform him what had occurred.

The traitor listened with inward rage.

"What!" said he, "he has refused to eat it? It is probably because he is not hungry."

"Don't touch it, I beg of you."

"So I suppose, Monsieur Lustucru; for your hash looks very nice. I should like it myself, and I 've half a mind to taste it, to set Moumouth an example." At this, Father Lustucru, in spite of his hardness, could not help trembling. For a minute he was horrified at his crime, and cried hastily: —

"Don't touch it, I beg of you!"

"Why not? Is there anything wrong in the hash?"

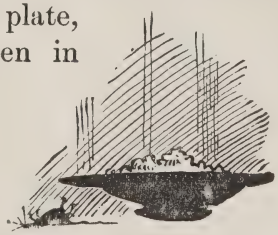
"No, certainly not," stammered Father Lustucru; "but what has been prepared for a cat should not serve for a Christian. It is necessary to guard propriety, and not trifle with the dignity of human nature."

Mother Michel accepted this reasoning, and said, a little snappishly: —

"Very well; Moumouth may suit himself! I do not wish to yield to all his fancies, and I shall not give him anything else."

The following day the hash was still uneaten.

The steward had hoped that the cat, pressed by hunger, would have thrown himself upon the poisoned food; but Moumouth knew how to suffer. He put up with abstinence, lived on scraps and crumbs of bread, and recoiled with terror every time that his guardian offered him the fatal plate, which finally remained forgotten in a corner of the closet in the antechamber.



The Fatal Plate remains forgotten.

Father Lustucru, seeing that his plot had not succeeded, was more irritable than ever. The desire to rid himself of Moumouth became a fixed idea with him, a passion, a monomania; he dreamed of it day and night. Each letter in which Madame de la Grenouillère demanded

news of the cat and repeated her promise of recompense to Mother Michel, each sign of interest given by the Countess to her two favorites, increased the blind fury of their enemy. He thought of the most infernal plans to demolish Moumouth without risk to himself, but none of them seemed sufficiently safe and expeditious. Finally he decided on this one: —

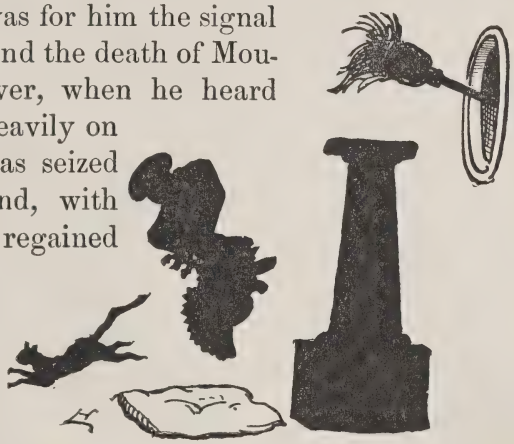
On a heavy pedestal, in the chamber of Mother Michel, was a marble bust of Louis XIV., represented with a Roman helmet and a peruke interlaced with laurel-leaves. Behind this bust was a round window, which looked upon the staircase; and just in front of the pedestal was the downy cushion that served as a bed for Moumouth, who would certainly have been crushed if the bust had taken it into its head to topple over

Louis XIV.

One night Lustucru stole noiselessly into the chamber of Mother Michel, opened the round window, which he was careful to leave ajar, and retired silently. At midnight, when everybody was asleep in the house, he took one of those long brooms, commonly called a wolf-head, placed himself on the staircase opposite the small window, rested his back firmly against the banister, and, with the aid

of the wolf-head, pushed over the bust, which tumbled with a loud crash on the cushion beneath.

The wicked man had expected this result of his movement; it was for him the signal of his triumph and the death of Moumouth. However, when he heard the bust roll heavily on the floor, he was seized by a panic, and, with trembling steps, regained his chamber. Mother Michel awoke with a start; she was in complete darkness, and unable to procure a light, for German chemical matches were not yet invented. Surprise and fright had taken away her faculties for an instant, then she cried, "Stop thief!" with all the strength of her lungs. Very soon the whole house was roused, and all the servants came running in to learn what was the matter.



Downfall of Louis XIV.

Lustucru appears.

Lustucru appeared last, with a cotton night-cap on his head, and, for the rest, very simply clad.

"What has happened?" he demanded.

"I see now," answered Mother Michel; "it is the bust of Louis XIV. that has fallen down."

"Bah!" said Father Lustucru, playing astonishment. "But, in that case, your cat must have received it on his head."

As he said these words, Moumouth came out from under the bed and threw himself before Mother Michel, as if to implore her aid and protection. Lustucru stood amazed.

Moumouth comes forth.

Everybody knows how light is the slumber of cats. Moumouth, who had the habit of sleeping with only one eye, had risen quickly on hearing a rustling behind the round window. Like nearly all animals, he was curious, and sought to understand anything that astonished him; so he camped himself in the middle of the chamber, the better to observe with what intention the wolf-head advanced at that unseasonable hour by so unusual a route. Startled by the fall of the bust, he had fled for refuge to the bottom of the alcove.

They gave Mother Michel, to revive her, a glass of sugar and water, flavored with orange-flower; they picked up the great king, who had smashed his nose

and chin, and lost half of his beautiful peruke; then everybody went to bed once more.

"Saved again!" said Father Lustucru to himself. "He always escapes me! I shall not be able, then, to send him to his fathers before the return of the Countess! Mother Michel will get her pension of fifteen hundred livres, and I shall remain a nobody, the same as before. That rascally cat distrusts me; everything I undertake alone against him fails. . . . . Decidedly, I must get somebody to help me!"

Mother Michel is revived.

CHAPTER VI.

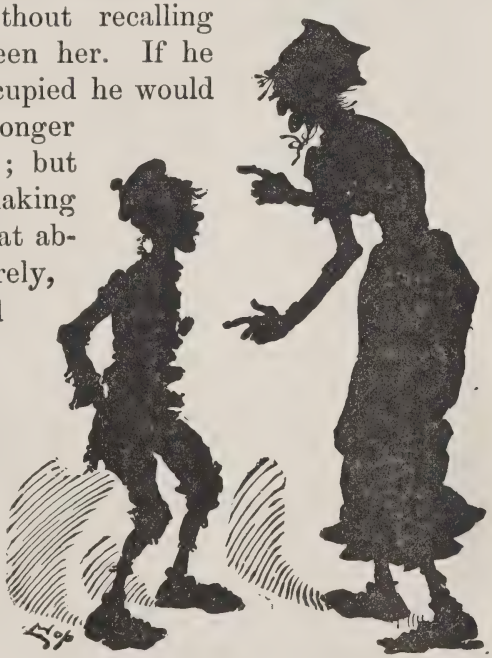
HOW FATHER LUSTUCRU CONFIDES HIS ODIOUS PLANS TO NICHOLAS FARIBOLE.

FATHER LUSTUCRU searched for an accomplice. He at first thought of finding one among the domestics of the household; but he reflected that they all were devoted to Mother Michel, and were capable of betraying him, and causing him to be shamefully turned out of the mansion, in which he held so honorable and lucrative a post. However, he had great desire for an accomplice. In what class, of what age and sex, and on what terms should he select one?

Occupied with these thoughts, Lustucru went out one morning at about half-past six, to take a walk on the quay. As he crossed the threshold, he noticed on the other side of the street a large woman, dry and angular, clothed in cheap, flashy colors. This woman had sunken eyes, a copper-colored complexion, the nose of a bird of prey, and a face as wrinkled

as an old apple. She was talking with a boy of thirteen or fourteen, covered with rags, but possessing a sharp, intelligent countenance.

Father Lustucru thought he recognized the old woman, but without recalling where he had seen her. If he had been less occupied he would have searched longer into his memory; but the idea of making away with the cat absorbed him entirely, and he continued his route with a thoughtful air, his head bent forward, his arms crossed upon his breast, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, as if the accomplice he wanted might possibly spring up out of the earth.



The old Woman and the Boy.

Thus he wandered for some time; the breeze of the morning failed to cool his blood, heated with evil passions. Neither the spectacle of the pure skies, nor the songs of the birds, who enjoyed themselves

on the border of the river, awoke in him those calm and sweet emotions with which they inspire honest people.

Lustucru is absorbed.

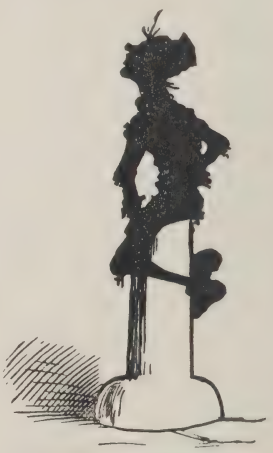
At the moment when he returned, the old woman was no longer to be seen; but the boy remained in the same place, seated upon a stone post, with his nose in the air, regarding the mansion of Madame de la Grenouillère very attentively. Lustucru approached him and addressed him in these terms: —

"What are you doing there, youngster?"

"I? Nothing. I am looking at that mansion."

"I believe that without difficulty; but why do you look at it?"

"Because I find it handsome, and would like to live in it; one ought to be happy there."



The Boy on the Stone Post.

"Yes, indeed," answered the steward, with emphasis; "they pass the days there happily enough. Who is that woman with whom you were speaking a while since?"

"It was Madame Bradamor."

"Madame Bradamor, the famous fortune-teller, who lives below, at the other end of the street?"

"The same."

"You know her?"

"A little; I sometimes do errands for her."

"Ah, ah! . . . . And what did the old wizard say to you?"

"She said that if I could enter that house as a domestic, I should have a very agreeable existence."

"Madame de la Grenouillère is absent, my little friend, and, besides, her house is full."

"That is a pity," said the boy, drawing a deep sigh.

Father Lustucru made several steps as if to re-enter, rested his hand upon the knocker of the door, then turned abruptly and walked up to the boy.

"What is your name?"

"Nicholas Langlumé, the same as my father's; but I am more generally known under the nickname of Faribole."

"What do you do?"

"Nothing; my father works on the quay, and I,— I live from day to day, gaining my bread as I can. I run errands, I sell May-bugs and black-birds and sparrows, I pick up nails in the gutters and sell them, I open the doors of carriages, I fish for logs in the Seine, I sing verses in the streets, I light lamps, and sometimes I play in the pantomimes at the theatre of Nicolet. These trades, sir, are not worth much; and

I have all I can do to get something to eat every day."

"You interest me," replied Father Lustucru, "and I've a wish to help you on in the world. Tell me, Faribole, have you a taste for cooking?"

"Rather! I love the tid-bits, but my means do not allow me" —

"I did not ask you if you were fond of eating, stupid! I asked you if you had the taste, the inclination, to do cooking."

"I don't know; I never tried."

"Well, then, Faribole, I will give you lessons. Come, follow me; I will clothe you and take care of you at my own expense, in awaiting the arrival of Madame de la Grenouillère. She is a good lady, and will doubtless retain you; but if she does not, your education will be commenced, and you 'll be able to place yourself elsewhere."

The Steward engages Faribole.

"You are, then, in the service of the Countess?"

"I am her steward," said Father Lustucru, with dignity.

The eyes of Faribole sparkled with pleasure; he bowed respectfully before the steward, and said with warmth: —

"Ah, how much I owe to you!"

Faribole was installed that same day, and cordially received by the other servants of the household. He was a good-natured boy, serviceable and quick, and, although a little awkward in his new clothes and at his new duties, he showed plenty of willingness.

A little awkward at first.

"Faribole," said the steward to his protégé, several days afterward, "It is well to let you know the ways of the house. There is an individual here, all-powerful, who reigns as sovereign master, whose will is obeyed, whose whims are anticipated, — and that individual is a cat. If you wish to make your way in the world, it is necessary to seek to please Moumouth; if the cat Moumouth accords you his affections, you will also have that of Madame de la Grenouillère and her companion, Mother Michel."

The Cat and the Boy become Friends.

"The cat shall be my friend, and I will be the friend of the cat," responded the young fellow, confidently.

In effect, he showered on Moumouth so many kindnesses and caresses and attentions, that the cat, although naturally suspicious, conceived a lively attachment for

Faribole, followed him with pleasure, teased him, and invited him to frolics. Mother Michel was nearly jealous of the small boy; Father Lustucru, who had ideas of his own, laughed in his sleeve, and rubbed his hands together.

The steward, one evening, ordered Faribole to come to his chamber, and after closing the door carefully and assuring himself that no one was listening, he said: —

"Moumouth is your friend; you have followed my recommendations exactly."

"I shall remain in the house — is it not so?"

"Probably. You find yourself very well here?"

"Without doubt! I, who lived on black bread, I make four good meals a day. I had a wretched blouse, full of holes, and patched trousers, and now I am dressed like a prince. I suffer no more from cold, and, instead of lying out under the stars, I go to sleep every night in a comfortable bed, where I dream of gingerbread and fruit-cake."

Father Lustucru rested his chin on the palm of his right hand, and fixing his piercing eyes upon Faribole, said to him: —

"Suppose you were obliged to take up again with the vagabond life from which I lifted you?"

"I believe I should die with shame!"

"Then you would do anything to preserve your present position?"

"I would do anything."

"Anything?"

"Anything, absolutely."

"Very well. Now, this is what I demand of you imperatively: Moumouth follows you willingly; to-morrow, just at night-fall, you will lead him into the garden; you will put him into a sack which I have made expressly, and tightly draw the cords of the sack" —

Lustucru and Faribole.

"And then?" said Faribole, who opened his eyes wide.

"We will each arm us with a stick, and we will beat upon the sack until he is dead."

"Never! never!" cried the poor boy, whose hair stood up with fright.

"Then pack your bundle quickly, and be off; I turn you away!"

"You turn me away!" repeated young Faribole, lifting up his hands to the sky.

"I do not give you five minutes to be gone; you depend upon me here, solely on me."

The unhappy Faribole began to weep, and the steward added, in a savage voice, —

"Come, now! no faces! Take off your clothes, and put on your rags, and disappear!"

Having pronounced these words, Lustucru took from a closet the miserable vestments which Faribole had worn the day of his installation. The steward seized them disdainfully between his thumb and forefinger, and threw them upon the floor.

Faribole's Old Clothes.

The boy looked with an air of despair at the habits he had on, compared them with those which he was obliged to resume, and the comparison was so little to the advantage of the latter, that he broke into loud sobs.

However, he was decided not to purchase handsome clothes at the price of a perfidy and a horrible murder. He resolutely threw off his vest, then his neckerchief; but at the idea of giving up his new shoes, of walking barefoot, as formerly, over roads paved with gravel and broken glass, the luckless Faribole had a moment of hesitation.

Father Lustucru, who observed him closely, profited by this circumstance with consummate cunning.

"Foolish fellow!" said he; "you refuse happiness when it would be so easy for you to retain it. If I proposed to you the death of a man, I could understand, I could even approve of your scruples; but I propose that of a cat — a simple cat! What do you find in that so terrible? What is a cat? Nothing — less than nothing; one does n't attach the least value to the lives of cats. Inn-keepers give them to their customers to eat; the most celebrated surgeons massacre them in making certain experiments. Cats are thought so little of, that when a litter of six or seven are born, only one is kept; the rest are tossed into the river."

"Only one is kept; the rest are tossed into the River."

"But Moumouth is large, Moumouth is fully grown," said Faribole in a plaintive tone; "and then, you do not know, I love him."

"You love him! you dare to love him!" cried the steward with inexpressible rage. "Very well! I — I detest him, and I wish his death!"

"But what has he done to you, then?"

"What business is that to you? I desire his death, and that 's enough."

"Mercy for him!" cried Faribole, throwing himself at the feet of hard-hearted Lustucru.

"No mercy!" replied Lustucru, hissing the words through his clenched teeth. "No mercy, neither for him nor for you. Get up, depart, be off this very instant! It rains in torrents; you will be drenched, you will die of cold this night, — so much the better!"

"Get up! Depart!"

A beating rain, mixed with hailstones, pattered against the window-panes, and the wind swept with a mournful sound through the halls of the house. Then poor Faribole thought of the cold that would seize him, of the privations which awaited him, of his few resources, of his immense appetite, and how disagreeable it was to sleep on the damp earth. His evil genius took possession of him, and whispered into his ear these words of Father Lustucru: "What is a cat?"

"Monsieur Lustucru," said he, weeping, "do not send me away, I will do all that you wish."

"To-morrow, at night-fall, you will lead Moumouth into the garden?"

"Yes, Monsieur Lustucru."

"You will put him into this sack?"

"Yes, Monsieur Lustucru."

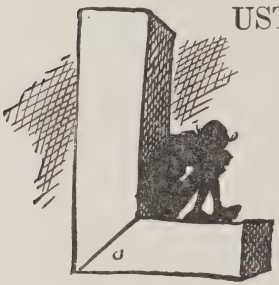
"And you will beat it with me?"

The response to this question was long coming; Faribole turned pale, his legs bent under him; finally he bowed his head, letting his arms droop at his sides, as if he had sunk under the weight of his destiny, and murmured, in a stifled voice: —

"Yes, Monsieur Lustucru."

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH FATHER LUSTUCRU IS ON THE POINT OF ACCOMPLISHING HIS PURPOSE, AND MOTHER MICHEL'S CAT IS IN AN UNPLEASANT PREDICAMENT.



USTUCRU had fixed the following day for the cruel execution of Moumouth, for he knew that Mother Michel on that day was to carry to the express office a package destined for her sister.

All the forenoon and afternoon Faribole was plunged in the darkest despondency, and when the fatal hour sounded, he was assailed by the irresolutions of the previous day. When Mother Michel, before going out, said to him, "I leave Moumouth in your charge; you must take care of him, and make him play, so that he will not fret too much during my absence," the poor lad felt his heart fail, and his natural loyalty revolted.

"Come, we have not a minute to lose," said Father Lustucru to Faribole; "here is the sack; go look for the beast!"

Faribole once more appealed to the pity of the steward; he was eloquent, he had tears in his voice, he pronounced a most touching plea, but without being able to gain his cause. The executioner was immovable; he insisted on the death of the cat; and the boy, overpowered by this evil spirit, saw himself forced to obey.

Moumouth allowed himself to be enticed into the garden; he followed his treacherous friend with the confidence of the lamb following the butcher, and, at the very moment when he least thought of it, he found himself fastened in the sack that was to be his tomb. Lustucru, who was hiding, appeared suddenly, bearing two enormous cudgels; he handed one to his accomplice, and taking hold of the sack, cried: — "Now! — to work, and no quarter!"

Faribole heard him not; the boy was struck with stupor — his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, his face was livid, his mouth open, his arms without strength.

Father Lustucru, animated by the nearness of his vengeance, did not remark what passed in the mind of his companion. Having thrown the sack rudely on the ground, the steward lifted his cudgel, and was about to strike when the small door of the garden opened.

"How unfortunate!" he muttered; "Faribole, hide yourself in the hedge; I will come back here presently."

The Steward lifted his Cudgel.

He approached the person who had entered, and halted, petrified with amazement, on beholding Mother Michel. He imagined at first that she had been brought back by some vague suspicion, by some presentiment; but he recovered himself, hearing her say: —

"I am obliged to postpone my walk, for I have seen Madame de la Grenouillère's carriage coming; it turned out of its way on account of the repairs being made in the street. By reëntering through the garden I was able to get here in advance. Come, Monsieur Lustucru, let us hasten to receive our good mistress."

Making a Speaking-trumpet of his Hand.

"I am with you, madame," said the steward; then, making a speaking-trumpet of his hand, he cried to Faribole: —

"Strike all alone! strike until the cat has ceased to move!" and he rejoined Mother Michel in the court, where the domestics were drawn up in a line like a well-drilled battalion.

On stepping from the carriage Madame de la Gre-

nouillère honored her servitors with a benevolent glance, embraced Mother Michel with touching familiarity, and demanded news of Moumouth.

The Countess embraces Mother Michel.

"Your protégé is wonderfully well," said Mother Michel, "he grows fatter and handsomer under our very eyes; but it may be said, without injury to the truth, that his moral qualities are even beyond his physical charms."

"Poor friend, if he does not love me he will be a monster of ingratitude, for since our separation I have thought of him constantly; Heaven has taken away many beings that were dear to me, but Moumouth will be the consolation of my old age!"

As soon as the Countess had given the orders which her arrival made necessary, she prayed Mother Michel to fetch Moumouth.

"He will be charmed to see you again, madame," Mother Michel answered; "he is in the garden in the care of Faribole, a little young man whom your

steward judged proper to admit to the house; the young rogue and the cat have become a pair of intimate friends."

Mother Michel went down to the garden and there found Faribole alone, seated upon a bench, and with a preoccupied air stripping the leaves from a branch of boxwood which he held in his hand.

Faribole seated in the Garden.

"My friend," said the good woman, "Madame, the Countess, desires you to bring Moumouth to her."

"Mou-mouth!" stammered Faribole, starting at the name as if he had been stung by a wasp.

"Yes, Moumouth; I thought he was with you."

"He just quitted me; some persons passing in the street made a noise that frightened him, and he leaped into the hedge."

Mother Michel, after having spent more than half an hour in scouring the garden, returned to Madame de la Grenouillère and said: "Moumouth is absent, madame; but do not be anxious; he disappeared once before, and we found him in the garret."

"Let him be searched for! I do not wish to wait. I desire to see him this instant!"

Alas! this desire was not likely to be gratified, if any reliance could be placed upon the words exchanged in the dark between Lustucru and his accomplice.

"Well, did you do it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Lustucru, I pounded until the cat ceased to move."

"What have you done with the body?"

"I have thrown it into the Seine."

"Was he quite dead?"

"He did n't stir."

"Anyway, the sack was securely fastened. Justice is done!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH MOTHER MICHEL SEARCHES FOR HER CAT.

SEVERAL days passed in painful expectation; but the cat, like General Marlborough, did not come back. The despair of Madame de la Grenouillère was sincere, profound, and silent, — all the more intense because it was suppressed. She continually pictured to herself the charming ways of Moumouth, his natural goodness, his superior intelligence. No animal had ever displayed to her so many brilliant qualities; not one of her previous favorites had ever caused her such bitter regrets.

Generous in her misfortune, she did not reproach Mother Michel; on the contrary, the Countess sought to comfort that poor woman, who had given herself up wholly to grief. The Countess said to her one night: —

"What can you do against an irresistible calamity? The wisdom of man consists not in struggling with

unhappiness, but in submitting himself to the will of Heaven."

"I am of your opinion," replied Mother Michel. "If I believed, like you, in the death of Moumouth, I would resign myself without a murmur. But I have the idea that he still lives; I picture him running through the streets, the victim of ill treatment, with saucepans, may be" —

"Go to, Mother Michel, you deceive yourself; Moumouth is dead, otherwise he would have come back to us."

"Something tells me that he is still in this world, and if Madame the Countess wishes to have tidings of him, she has only to address herself" —

"To whom?"

"To our neighbor, Madame Bradamor, that celebrated fortune-teller, who predicts the future, removes freckles, reads in the Book of Destinies, and charms away the toothache."

"Fie, Mother Michel! how can you, a sensible woman, have any confidence in the juggling of an adventuress?"

"But, madame, I am not alone; the most distinguished people go to Madame Bradamor; she is more learned and less dear than her rivals, and asks only ten crowns to make you behold the devil Astaroth."

"Enough, for pity's sake!" responded the Countess, dryly.

Mother Michel remained silent; but she had made

up her mind, and, the first time she had a moment of liberty, she ran to the house of the necromancer.

The fortune-teller occupied a spacious apartment richly furnished, for she gained a great deal of money by cheating the public. Her consultation-room was draped with hangings of black velvet sprinkled with gilt stars; upon a square table, in the centre of the chamber, stood painted tin obelisks, jars of electricity, retorts, and divers mathematical instruments, of whose uses the pretended sorceress was quite ignorant, but which she had placed there in order to impose on the weak-minded persons who came to consult her.

She at first showed some embarrassment on beholding Mother Michel; however, after having closed a glass door which communicated with the other apartments, she returned to salute her new client, and said in a solemn tone: —

"What is your desire?"

"To question the present, the past, and the future."

"I am the very one to satisfy you," replied Madame Bradamor; "but what you demand is very difficult, and will cost you three crowns."

"There they are; I give them to you with all my heart."

Madame Bradamor, full of regret that she had not insisted on having more, pocketed the money, and began in these terms: —

"What is the date of your birth?"

"The 24th of May, 1698."

"What are the initials of your name and the first letter of the place in which you were born?"

Mother Michel pays Three Crowns.

"A, R, M. N, L, S."

Madame Michel was named Anastasie Ravegot; the widow, since twelve years, of François Michel, in life inspector of butter in the Paris markets; she was born in Noisy-le-Sec.

"What is your favorite flower?"

"The Jerusalem artichoke."

After these customary questions, the fortune-teller examined some coffee-grounds poured into a saucer, and said: —

"Phaldarus, the genie of things unknown, informs me that you are in search of a being very dear to you."

Mother Michel bounded in her chair with surprise.

Madame Bradamor continued: "This being is not a man; it is a quadruped — either a dog or a cat. Ariel, spirit celestial, reveals to me that it is a cat."

Mother Michel was more and more impressed; without giving her time to recover herself, the fortune-teller took a pack of cards, shuffled them, cut them three times, then disposed them in a systematic order on the table, and said gravely: —

"Your cat is the knave of clubs; let us see what happens to him. One, two, three, four; ten of spades! He is a wanderer, he has a passion for travel, he sets out at night to see the curiosities of Paris. One, two, three, four; the queen of spades! It is a woman who manufactures ermine fur out of cat-skin. One, two, three, four; the knave of spades! It is a rag-picker. One, two, three, four; the king of spades! It is a restaurant-keeper. The falling together of these three persons alarms me. One, two, three, four, — clubs! One, two, three, four, — clubs again! One, two, three, four, — always clubs.

Your cat would bring money to these three persons: the rag-picker wishes to kill him in order to sell the skin to the furrier, and the body to the restaurant-keeper, who will serve it up to his customers as stewed rabbit. Will the cat be able to resist his

The Fortune-teller consults her Cards.

persecutors. One, two, three, four; seven of spades! It is all over, madame; your cat no longer exists!"

"They have eaten him, the cannibals!" cried Mother Michel, sinking back, and she fancied she heard a plaintive *miau*, the last agonized cry of Moumouth. But it was not an illusion; a cat had miaued, and was still miauing in the next chamber.

Suddenly a pane of glass in the door described was shivered to atoms, and Moumouth in person tumbled at the feet of Mother Michel.

From the top of a wardrobe he had perceived his affectionate guardian; he had called to her several times, and as she did not answer him, he had thrown himself, in his desperation, against the glass door, through which he had broken a passage.

Moumouth appears.

"My cat was with you!" said Mother Michel; "you have stolen him! My mistress is powerful; my mistress is the Countess Yolande de la Grenouillère; she will have you chastised as you deserve to be!"

While making these threats Mother Michel placed Moumouth under her arm, and prepared to depart. Madame Bradamor stopped her, saying: —

"Do not ruin me, I conjure you! I have not stolen your cat!"

"How is it in your house, then?"

"I have it from a little boy named Faribole; he

got this cat for me, which I have long desired to have, on account of his supernatural shape and appearance, to figure in my cabalistic conjurations. This is the truth, the whole truth. I beg of you that your mistress will not disturb me."

"Madame the Countess will act as she thinks

"Do not ruin me, I conjure you!"

proper," responded Mother Michel, haughtily; and she vanished with her cat.

She made but one step from the house of Madame Bradamor to that of Madame de la Grenouillère; one would have said that Mother Michel had on the seven-league boots of little Tom Thumb. She did not linger in the parlor, when she arrived out of

breath and unable to speak a word, but carried Moumouth straight to the Countess.

On recognizing the animal, the Countess gave so loud a cry of joy that it was heard as far as the Place de la Carrousel.

Lustucru assisted at this touching scene. At the sight of the cat he was so dumbfounded that his reason wavered for a moment. He imagined that the cat, so many times saved, was a fantastic being, capable of speaking, like the beasts in the fairy-tales, and he said to himself with a shiver: "I am lost! Moumouth is going to denounce me!"

Lustucru assisted at this touching Scene.

CHAPTER IX.

WHICH IS SATISFACTORY TO EVERYBODY BUT THE GUILTY.

S soon as Madame de la Grenouillère learned how Moumouth had been recovered, she ordered young Faribole to be brought before her.

"I'll go and look him up," said Father Lustucru, with alacrity. He was very anxious to warn his accomplice, and sought an excuse to steal off.

"No, remain! You have admitted him to the mansion, you shall see him turned away, and will learn to bestow your confidence more wisely in future."

Lustucru remained, and, recovering from his first stupor, resolved to boldly deny everything, if Faribole should dare to accuse him.

Introduced into the parlor, Faribole did not wait to be interrogated.

"Madame the Countess," said he, "the presence of your cat tells me why you have called me; but

Faribole Explains.

I am less guilty than I appear; permit me to explain."

"It is useless," replied Madame de la Grenouillère; "your justification is impossible."

"The steward, believing it best to play a bold game, said with irony: —

"I am curious to know what unlikely story this rogue has to tell," and in accenting these words slowly he gave Faribole a glance which signified: "If you accuse me, woe to you!'"

Without allowing himself to be confused, Faribole commenced in these terms: —

"It is necessary to avow it, madame; I entered into your service with the intention of stealing your cat; the fortune-teller wished to have him, to make him play the part of the devil Astaroth; and she had seduced me by the promise of a crown of six livres and a pair of shoes. They treated me so well, and Moumouth appeared to me so charming, that I renounced my wicked plans; I never, no, never would have put them into execution, if I had not found it was necessary to get Moumouth out of the way in order to rescue him from the attacks of an enemy all the more terrible because he was hidden."

"Of whom does he wish to speak?" demanded Lustucru.

"Of you! of you who have said to me, 'Kill Moumouth, or I chase you from the house!'"

"I, I have said that! what an impudent falsehood!

Ah, Madame the Countess, you know me well enough not to hesitate between the declarations of this fellow and my flat denial."

"Faribole," said the Countess severely, "your charge is grave; can you bring any proof to support it?"

"Proof, alas! no, madame; but I am ready to swear to you" —

"Enough," interrupted the Countess; "do not add calumny to the theft of the cat, but deliver me of your presence."

The miserable Faribole wished to protest, but at a sign from Madame de la Grenouillère, Lustucru seized him by the arm, led him through the door without further ceremony, and treated him in so rough a manner on the staircase as to quite relieve him of any idea of asking for his personal effects.

Faribole is treated Roughly on the Staircase.

However, the iniquities of the steward were not to remain long unpunished; that same day, Mother Michel, in arranging the closet in the antechamber, was very much astonished at finding the bodies of several dead rats and mice; she was wondering what had caused their death, when she recognized the famous hash that the cat had refused to eat, and which had been left there

by mistake. Two mice were dead in the plate itself, so powerful and subtile was the poison!

This discovery tore away the veil which covered the past of Lustucru. Mother Michel, divining that the charges of Faribole were well founded, hastened to inform Madame de la Grenouillère, who recommended her to keep silent, and sent for the steward.

"Have you still the 'Death to Rats?'" she asked him.

"Yes, madame, I think I have a little left."

"Some should be placed in the antechamber; you have not thought of that before?"

"Never, madame; I did not know there were rats in that part of the house."

"Very well; you can retire."

Madame de la Grenouillère wrote to a celebrated chemist, who, after having analyzed the hash, declared that it contained a prodigious quantity of poison.

A Celebrated Chemist analyzes the Hash.

The crime of Lustucru was then evident; but other proofs were not long in rising against him. The adventure of Croquemouche and Guignolet was talked about among the boatmen; Faribole heard the story from one of them, and discovered a person who had seen Lustucru throw Moumouth from the bridge of Notre Dame.

The steward, confounded, did not wait to be dis-

The Fate of the Steward.

charged; he fled, and, to escape the vengeance of Madame de la Grenouillère, embarked as cook on board of a merchant vessel bound for Oceanica.

It was afterward learned that this ship had been wrecked upon the Sandwich Islands, and that the savages had eaten Lustucru. History records that at the moment of expiring he pronounced but a single word, the name of Moumouth!

Lustucru flies.

What was it that brought this name to the lips of the guilty man? Was it remorse? or was it the last explosion of an unforgiving hatred? This is what history has neglected to inform us.

The health of Madame de la Grenouillère had been altered by the heavy shocks she had experienced in losing her favorite animals. The tenderness and graces of Moumouth would perhaps have been sufficient to attach her to life; but the respectable lady had reached an age when sorrows press very heavily. Mother Michel had the grief, one morning, to find the Countess dead in her bed; her face was so calm and bore so plainly the impress of all her lovable qualities, that one would have believed she slept. She was nearly in her seventy-ninth year.

By her will, which she had deposited with her lawyer, she had left to Moumouth and Mother Michel

an income of two thousand livres, to revert, in case of the death of either, to the survivor.

Mother Michel took up her residence near her sister, provided handsomely for all the children, and selected for her own retreat a pretty cottage situated in Low-Breton upon the banks of the river among the green trees.

Mother Michel's Cottage.

Faribole, received again into the service of Madame de la Grenouillère, conducted himself so well that his transient error was forgotten. He would have been able to distinguish himself in the kitchen, but he preferred to serve the State, and enlisted at the age of sixteen in an infantry regiment. He took part in the expedition against Majorca under the command of Marshal Richelieu, and was named corporal after the capture of Port-Mahon, June the 29th, 1756. When he obtained his discharge, he returned to live near Mother Michel, for whom he had an affection truly filial. To the agitations of their existence succeeded calm and happy days, embellished by the constantly increasing graces of Moumouth.

Our cat henceforth was without an enemy; he won, on the contrary, the esteem and affection of all who knew him. His adventures had made him quite

Moumouth and his Family.

famous. Besides the ballad, — of which, unfortunately, only two couplets have been preserved, — the poets of the period wrote in his honor a large number of verses that have not come down to us. He received visits from the most distinguished men of the time, even from the King himself, who once, on his way to the Chateau of Bellevue, dropped in for a moment on Moumouth.

A grand lady of the court condescended to choose for Moumouth a very gentle and very pretty companion, whom he accepted with gratitude. In seeing himself a father Moumouth's happiness was at its highest, as was also that of Mother Michel, who felt that she lived again in the posterity of her cat.

You wish to know what finally became of Moumouth ? He died, — but it was not until after a long and joyous career. His eyes, in closing, looked with sweet satisfaction upon groups of weeping children and grandchildren. His mortal remains were not treated like those of ordinary cats. Mother Michel had built for him a magnificent mausoleum of white marble. Following a custom then adopted at the burial of all illustrious personages, they engraved upon the tomb of Moumouth an epitaph in Latin, composed by a learned professor of the University of Paris.

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